$5 Depression-Era Recipes

by KATHERINE PATERSON December 21, 2023 29

Much like today, the Great Depression was a challenging time in America. The Great Depression was marked by economic hardship and resource scarcity.

In the face of adversity, families had to get creative with their meals, concocting affordable and filling recipes.

We can learn from the past and implement these time-tested ideas in our present lives to get through difficult times and move forward.

The following recipes are budget-friendly and show us that a little can go a long way with some creativity and determination.

Potato Soup

Nothing is more satisfying on a cold night than a warm bowl of potato soup.

Ingredients:

- Potatoes
- Onions
- Water
- Salt and pepper

Instructions:

Peel and dice the potatoes and onions. Bring them to a boil in a large pot until tender. To thicken the soup, mash some of the potatoes in it. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Average Cost: *$3-$5 depending on location and pricing*

Bean and Rice Casserole

Beans and rice are an affordable staple that should be a part of every American pantry.

Ingredients:

- Dried beans
- Rice
- Onions
- Canned tomatoes

Instructions:

Cook the beans until tender. Cook rice separately. Mix the beans and rice with sautéed onions and canned tomatoes. Bake at 350 for 15 to 20 minutes or until flavors meld together.

Related: **Canning Mormon Beans For Long Term Preservation**

Average Cost: *$3-$5 depending on location and pricing*

Bread Pudding

Bread pudding is the perfect bedtime snack to fill hungry bellies.

Ingredients:

- Stale bread
- Milk
- Eggs
- Sugar

Instructions:

Tear the bread into small pieces. Mix with a blend of milk, beaten eggs, and sugar. Bake until set, and enjoy a comforting and filling dessert.

Average Cost: *Depending on your location and current pricing, this treat can be created for less than $3 per serving*

Simple Vegetable Soup

A healthy option for any meal, this recipe can be adapted to fit any items you have on hand.

Ingredients:

- Carrots
- Potatoes
- Corn
- Green beans
- Broth and water

Instructions:

Chop vegetables and simmer in a pot of broth until they are fully cooked. Season with salt and pepper. Store or freeze this soup for a hearty and nutritious meal anytime.

Average Cost: *Around $3 depending on location and pricing, cheaper if you can grow your vegetables at home. You can* ***learn here*** *how to make a year-round self-sustaining garden.*

Cornmeal Pancakes

Cornmeal pancakes are super easy to make, cost next to nothing, and are so filling. Perfect for any meal.

Ingredients:

- Cornmeal (1+ cup)
- Flour (4 ½ oz)
- Milk (1 cup)

- Baking powder (1 tbsp)
- *optional: 2 eggs, 3 tbsp sugar

Instructions:

Mix ingredients into a batter. Cook on a grill for a simple and satisfying breakfast. These delicious morsels can be made ahead and kept warm in an oven for up to an hour or frozen for enjoyment later.

Average Cost: *$2- $3 depending on location*

Cabbage and Noodles

Cabbage is affordable or can be easily grown at home. It is packed full of nutrients and provides many health benefits.

Ingredients:

- Cabbage
- Egg noodles
- Butter or margarine

Instructions:

Sauté cabbage in butter. Boil egg noodles and mix with cabbage. It is an affordable and comforting dish to use as a side, or you can add protein to make it a meal.

Average Cost: *$3-$4*

Fried Bologna Sandwich

A popular staple throughout American history, the fried bologna sandwich is still beloved by many.

Ingredients:

- Bologna slices
- Bread
- Mustard

Instructions:

Fry bologna slices until crispy. Make a sandwich and add mustard for a quick and tasty lunch.

Average Cost: *$2-$5 depending on location and current grocery prices*

Rice Pudding

Another affordable option for a filling dessert is rice pudding.

Ingredients:

- Rice

- Milk
- Sugar
- Cinnamon

Instructions:

Cook rice in milk and sugar until creamy. Sprinkle with cinnamon for a sweet treat.

Average Cost: *$4*

Mock Apple Pie

No apples? That's okay. We've got you covered with this mock apple pie recipe.

Ingredients:

- Crackers
- Sugar
- Cinnamon
- Water

Instructions:

Crush crackers and mix with sugar, cinnamon, and a little water to create a paste. Bake for 15 minutes in a pie crust at 425 for a surprising substitute.

Average Cost: *$4-$5 depending on location and pricing*

Egg Drop Soup

This Asian-inspired delight can be easily made on a budget and stored easily.

Ingredients:

- Chicken broth
- Eggs
- Green onions
- Soy sauce

Instructions:

Bring chicken broth to a simmer. Beat eggs and slowly pour into the broth. Stir gently, add chopped green onions, and season with soy sauce.

⇒ **Learn How to Keep Eggs Fresh for at Least a Decade**

Average Cost: *$5, depending on your location*

Corn Chowder

Corn chowder is another perfect meal for a cold fall night and is easy to make.

Ingredients:

- Corn kernels
- Potatoes
- Milk
- Butter

Instructions:

Boil potatoes and corn in a pot. Add milk and butter. Simmer until the potatoes are tender for a rich and satisfying chowder.

Average Cost: *$3-$5 depending on your location and current sales*

Ritz Cracker Casserole

Cooking doesn't get much easier than this Ritz Cracker Casserole.

Ingredients:

- Ground meat (any type)
- Ritz crackers
- Tomato sauce
- Cheese

Instructions:

Brown ground meat. Layer with crushed Ritz crackers, tomato sauce, and cheese. Bake until bubbly and golden.

Average Cost: *$3-$4 depending on choices location, and current pricing*

Potato Patties

One of my all-time favorites, potato patties are cheap, quick, and perfect for any meal.

Ingredients:

- Mashed potatoes
- Flour
- Egg
- Salt and pepper

Instructions:

Mix mashed potatoes with flour and beaten egg. Form into patties and fry until golden.

Related: How to Can Potatoes for Long Term Preservation

Average Cost: *Around $3 depending on location*

Navy Bean Soup

Beans were an essential staple during The Great Depression and often worked into every meal. Navy bean soup was one popular bean recipe that is still popular today.

Ingredients:

- 2-3 cups dried navy beans
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- chopped onion
- Diced ham or ham hock
- 2 cups broth
- 2 cups water

Instructions:

Soak the navy beans according to package instructions, rinsing them clean before and after soaking. Mix the beans with the can of tomatoes, onion, ham, broth, and water; season to taste.

For thicker soup, puree the cooked beans in a food processor and add them back into the soup, stirring well to combine.

Average Cost: *$3-$4 per serving*

Creativity Counts

While they may require you to be a little creative, these Depression-era recipes are not only budget-friendly but also provide a glimpse into the resourcefulness of families during challenging times.

Although we may not face the same economic hardships or lack of access today that citizens met in the past, these recipes remind us that delicious and nutritious meals can be crafted with simple, affordable ingredients if you are creative.

Try these dishes to experience a taste of history, bring a touch of nostalgia to your modern kitchen, or save some cash. A little creativity and some frugal shopping can make a big difference.

Do you have a good Depression-era recipe that can be made for less than 5 bucks? Please share it in the comments, and let’s create affordable go-to recipes we can all enjoy.